



Finalist's case study

University of Chester

Food & Drink

Just the VEGANning



University of Chester

Profile

- University of Chester
- Over 20,000 students (includes full and part time students)
- 2090 staff
- Semi-rural

About the project

Summary

The University of Chester strives to put sustainability at the heart (and stomach) of everything it does. This year there was a cross- institutional approach, focussing on reducing the environmental impact of the whole institution by encouraging and advocating the environmental and health benefits of vegetarian and vegan diets.

The efforts to reduce meat consumption are an integral part of the institution's sustainability commitment to reduce Scope 3 emissions.

'VeggieFest' provided a unique occasion for staff and students at the University, local social enterprises and other local businesses to share their passion and enthusiasm for locally sourced, vegetarian and vegan food. Students from the Department of Geography and International Development were commissioned to review and analyse the reduction of consumption of animal products across campus, as part of their final year Sustainable Futures Module.

Project partners

The project was led internally by the Chester Library Green Impact team, Catering Department, students from the Department of Geography and International Development and the Sustainability Unit. The Chester Library team secured a grant from the Vegetarian Society to fund ingredients for Veggie Fest.

The results

The problem

The University is committed to sourcing food products, sustainably and locally, while continuing to provide varied and diverse menu choices for all customers. Meat and dairy products are carbon intensive. Therefore, as part of the Food Sustainability Statement, the catering team aim to reduce meat and dairy consumption across all outlets. The launch of the new vegetarian bar in the main dining hall, provided the opportunity to raise awareness of vegetarian and vegan diets. However, the difficulty lies in changing consumer behaviour.



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The approach

We have taken a holistic and inclusive approach by working with students and academic and support departments. The Catering team launched a vegetarian bar in the main dining hall in October 2016. The Sustainability Unit regularly works to support and promote the catering initiatives and collaborate on a longstanding final year undergraduate module that provides students with the opportunity to work on real-life projects. This year the students were commissioned to evaluate the impact of the new vegan bar on the amount of meat purchased, in comparison to previous years.

In addition the Chester Library team have been outstanding participants throughout the lifetime of the Green Impact programme, and wanted to go beyond the actions of the workbook to host an event to dispel the myths surrounding vegan/vegetarian foods and diets. In partnership with Catering and the Sustainability Unit they founded the inaugural Veggie Fest.

Our goals

To promote the vegan/vegetarian bar in the main dining hall.

To enthuse and educate consumers about vegan/vegetarian diets and raise awareness about how they can contribute to a lower carbon lifestyle.

To offer students the opportunity to engage and influence the Sustainable Food Policy and broader Sustainability strategy at the University.

Obstacles and solutions

Obstacle	Solutions
Changing attitudes	Creating a fun, inviting event that people want to attend. Securing the small grant towards the cost of ingredients, meant that more people, from a variety of departments could get involved. The event was free for all to attend, with plenty of free tasters. Many people commented that they did not think veggie food could taste so good with one remarking "the food was delicious, I am a meat eater, but following the event, I would actively seek out vegan food, and I am really looking forward to the vegan pop-up night!". Many took away recipe cards to try at home.
Collaborating with new teams	Bringing together new teams to organise and deliver an event brought a fresh perspective, as well as a break from the 'regular' attendees. Reaching a broader mix of staff and raising awareness of the options available on campus. An unexpected outcome of the event was staff making new contacts from departments they would not typically have come across or work with. The library team, harnessed the skills of their team, to produce recipe cards for all foods at the event, so people could make replicate them, themselves.
Longevity	Maintaining enthusiasm and momentum can be difficult. A number of awards events held over the summer embraced vegan options for the platters, including the Students' Union's Above and Beyond Awards and the Sustainability Unit's Green Tie Awards. Plans are already in place for a Vegan Pop up Restaurant and film night, and a VeGreen Society of students and staff has been founded to share recipes, places to eat out and have plans to hold a Christmas ball.



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Performance and results

The student projects calculated that meat consumption had reduced by 37% compared to the previous year. More than 150 staff and students attended Veggie Fest, of which 50% said that the event had encouraged them to actively reduce their meat consumption and took recipe cards away.

The future

Lessons learned

Collaboration from so many departments is something which is normally quite difficult to achieve, with teams dispersed over multiple sites. However, the collective enthusiasm of all who were involved in this project allowed everything to run smoothly and enhance new collaborations and relationships between departments. VeggieFest truly epitomises all that we want to achieve in terms of embedding sustainability at the heart of all our operations. Sustainability requires a holistic approach and the collaboration between support and academic departments, staff and students meant that this was one of the most engaging and successful events of the year.

Top 3 learnings from implementing your project

1. Free food gets people through the door!
2. Enthusiasm is infectious, be creative, think big then see what you can achieve!
3. Support one another and seek the mutual benefits.

Sharing your project

The project has been publicised in the staff newsletter. As well as a double page spread in the Autumn edition of student news, which also highlighted the work of the student projects

https://emailassets.chester.ac.uk/Student_News_Autumn2017.pdf The Sustainability Unit and the Catering team are working with colleagues in the Humanities department to explore the criteria for becoming a CreatureKind institution.

What has it meant to your institution to be a Green Gown Award finalist?

Having our work recognised by the Green Gown awards is a fantastic achievement, and the icing on the cake for such a successful 12 months of raising the profile of vegetarian and vegan offerings at the University. It gives us a boost to keep motivating our staff and students and explore new ideas and events to get our customers thinking more sustainably and joining us.

Further information

Twitter @UoCCatering @GreenChester www.greenchester.co.uk <https://www.chester.ac.uk/support-and-services-department/catering>